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Survey of 1996 Maritime University Graduates

Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)

April 17, 1998 10:20

High graduate satisfaction and increased employment are two of the main findings of the 1996 Graduate Follow-up Survey released today by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

The report surveyed university graduates from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland on a number of issues, including why they entered university, how they financed their education, and their overall satisfaction with their university degree and experience.

"This report provides valuable information we can use to track the success and satisfaction of graduates and a reliable quantitative benchmark for future research," said commission spokesperson Peter Rans. "The 1996 survey clearly indicates that a university education is still a good investment of both time and money. However, it also raises some areas of concern requiring further study."

Overall, 90 per cent of the class of 1996 expressed satisfaction with the facilities, services and faculties of Atlantic Canadian universities. Most graduates, 87 per cent, felt their university experience was worth their time, energy and money.

Almost all graduates, 95 per cent, held at least one job since graduation. The graduate unemployment rate had also decreased to 13.4 per cent, down more than one percentage point since the 1995 survey.

Despite better job prospects, survey results indicated that nearly half of employed 1996 graduates were not yet working in jobs requiring the level of education they had attained.

University education is preparation for life, not just for a first job, and smart employers hire graduates as much for their potential as for their initial assignments. Nevertheless, under-employment would be a concern if it were to persist for a number of years.

Weekly earnings for full-time employed graduates were also up, rising to an average of $562 per week, about $25 more than the class of 1995.

The report also indicates wages rose in proportion to years of study. In general, those who acquire professional and graduate degrees earned higher levels of income.

Pay inequity was highlighted in the 1995 survey and continues to be a concern for the class of 1996. The average annual earnings of a male full-time employee were $32,399, while a full-time female employee earned an average of $27,087. On average, women earned about 84 per cent of the men's average, if both were

employed in full-time, comparable positions.

Female university graduates are narrowing the gap however, and doing better than the general population of women in full-time, full-year positions, who on average earn 71 per cent of what males earn in this region.

Contrary to the belief that many of our graduates are going down the road, this study found Atlantic Canada retained about 87 per cent of graduates who had lived in the region prior to attending university.

The report also provides valuable information about how students pay for their university education. Almost 47 per cent of the class of 1996 did not need to borrow to finance their education. Of the 53 per cent who did, almost all relied on a government student loan.

The average debt load for student assistance borrowers increased approximately $3,000 in a single year. This increase reflects changes in costs and government loan and funding programs.

While the average debt load of 1996 graduates was $15,802, 19 per cent of graduates reported debt loads in excess of $25,000. This highlights the need to continue working with the federal government, universities and students on the debt load issue.

As with the class of 1995, one in four graduates experienced problems in repaying their student loans in the first year after graduation.

The majority of students, 88 per cent, also worked to finance part of their university education. Of these, about 63 per cent worked during both the school year and summer, five per cent worked during the school year only, and 32 per cent worked during the summer only.

In the future, the results of this survey will be compared with surveys of future graduates to track trends, reveal findings particular to each province, and compare research to the rest of Canada.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission was established in 1974 to assist the Maritime provinces and universities to achieve more efficient and effective use of resources in the field of higher education in the region.

The 19 members of the commission are drawn from the Maritime provinces, and represent higher education institutions, governments, and the general public.
AU CHEF DES NOUVELLES: Ce communique est egalement disponible en francais; appeler 902-424-4492 ou c. elec. rossng@gov.ns.ca .

NOTE: The following is intended for use by broadcast media.

A new follow-up survey of university graduates

is finding high satisfaction and increased employment among the class of 1996.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission surveyed graduates from the four Atlantic Provinces on why they entered university, how they paid for their education, and their overall satisfaction.

While most grads said they were happy with their university experience, the survey shows that students are facing bigger debt loads.

On the bright side, the survey also revealed that '96 grads have had more success finding jobs than those who graduated in 1995, and they're earning more.

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ngr Apr. 17, 1998 10:20 a.m.

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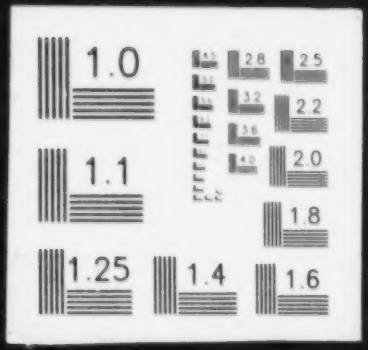
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